

DR. WOOD'S REPORT ON THE F.S.A.A. BIENNIAL MEETING

The Biennial meeting of the Family Service Association of America took place in Detroit from November 10 to November 13 of this year. Those in attendance from this agency were Mr. Kilduff, Mrs. Casey, and myself. Mrs. Casey was actually not there as a representative of our agency, but by virtue of her position in Project Enable - her name card so identified her.

The opening meeting Wednesday evening featured an address by the outgoing President, Roy Morgan, who unfortunately felt obliged to punctuate his remarks at all times by a series of incredibly unfunny jokes, but delivered a forceful address if these were disregarded. His theme was the importance of the Voluntary Agency in an age of bigger and bigger government, and he concluded by saying: "when voluntarism is downgraded, democracy dies."

The theme of the meeting was "Family Strength - Focus of Community Concern," and the emphasis was placed squarely on community action programs. Keynotes were the concepts of:

1. Change.
2. Flexibility of programs, adapting them to community needs.
3. Reaching out into the community, a service based on client need rather than on client motivation.

From the time I have joined this Board there has been a continuing undercurrent of philosophical debate or dialogue between those who feel the emphasis should be on traditional family oriented casework offered to those families sufficiently motivated to seek assistance, and those who feel the Bureau should go out into the deprived areas of the community where individuals lack the motivation or facilities to seek the guidance themselves. This undercurrent has surfaced from time to time, and it was my impression that it played a role in the famous (or infamous) Hyde report.

Since the War on Poverty has been declared, there is hardly room anymore for the traditional debate. It is widely felt that the hard core third generation poor cannot be properly self-motivated, and because of their ingrained status lack not only the knowledge of how to seek help to better their lot, but also the desire - desire having yielded to apathy through repeated frustration. To break this cycle, all agencies concerned with the poor must go out into the community, and this out-reach is now basic to the philosophy of F.S.A.A. as well as to the more traditionally oriented Welfare programs.

Repeatedly we were told that Boards must be more responsive to community needs, that reaching out may well include home visits, and that a comprehensive program of family service may well include aid with employment problems, school problems, alcohol and narcotic addiction, old age and health problems, etc. - all of this rather than the relatively narrower psychodynamically oriented casework which has been the traditional mainstay of our service. Mr. Goodman, Executive Director of the Pittsburgh Jewish Family and Children's Service described their block by block, house by house operation funded under the Office of Economic Opportunity, in which they actively go out, and look for problems, and offer concrete assistance. Even short term assistance with specific problems may be applicable. The use of non-professional workers with casework supervision was emphasized.

Much attention was devoted to practical ways to develop and implement public issues programs, the latter being considered as the preventive aspect of family service. In other words, improve living environment and family problems will not assume the magnitude they do. Note my intentional use of the words "living environment," because these are the last two words in project "Enable." F.S.A.A. says the same thing a little differently - improve social conditions to promote family welfare. The key in developing public issues programs is imagination and interest on the part of the lay members of the Board. The professional staff can bring problems to the attention of the Board, but the Board must carry the ball in developing the programs.

Examples of public issues programs can be found in those programs which have won the Margaret Elden Rich Memorial Award which is given biennially by the F.S.A.A. to a member agency for "distinguished leadership in undertaking or promoting a significant community or legislative action benefitting family life."

1. In 1959 the award was made to the Social Service League of Montgomery County, Rockville, Maryland, for a project which resulted in the establishment of a public assistance program for the able-bodied unemployed.
2. In 1961 the Family Service Society of New Orleans won the Award for its work in defense of the Aid to Dependent Children program, and public school system of Louisiana.
3. In 1963 the Family Service Association of Indianapolis won the Award for organizing a state-wide social action group to reform an antiquated system of relief administration in Indiana and provide improved welfare services to needy families.
4. This year the Award was won by Family Service of the Cincinnati Area for leadership in working for the passage of state-enabling legislation for Aid to Families with Dependent Children, unemployed Grantees, and other outstanding accomplishments in the field of public issues.
5. The use of staff members as expert witnesses in court in cases involving social problems was brought up at the meeting as an example of social issues programs which could be developed, also.
6. The development of a state citizens' council to review, and summarize for the public, bills coming before the legislature.

It is apparent that Board members must work with the news and information media, and with the leadership in local government, legal and welfare circles in developing programs.

So far as our own agency is concerned, I think that our participation in programs such as Collegefields and Enable testify to our concern for our community responsibility, but obviously this must be the beginning, not the end. As a Board we should perhaps increase our participation in the debates on social issues of today. Our professional staff will undoubtedly be called upon to provide more concrete forms of assistance, and to reach out into the community. What with the participation of non-professional personnel, as in Project Enable, the danger of degeneration into straight welfare work must be controlled by the Staff's preeminent training and experience in casework, so that we end up providing not just welfare services, but welfare plus, the emphasis being on the plus.